European media report US plans to strike Iran

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German and Turkish media have reported that the US government is planning air strikes against Iran. The reports suggest that the attacks could take place in early 2006.

On December 30, the German magazine *Der Spiegel* discussed recent articles on the subject in the German press, including a report by Udo Ulfkotte of the news agency DDP. Citing unnamed "Western security sources," Ulfkotte wrote that a possible air strike was discussed during a recent meeting between CIA Director Porter Goss and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdrogan.

"More specifically," *Der Spiegel* wrote, "Goss is said to have asked Turkey to provide unfettered exchange of intelligence that could help with a mission. DDP also reported that the governments of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman and Pakistan have been informed in recent weeks of Washington's military plans."

According to the DDP, Goss provided evidence that supposedly demonstrates a connection between Iran and Al Qaeda. Given the attempt by Washington to cloak all of its imperialist ambitions with the mantra of the "war on terror," purported evidence of this sort would be critical in preparing any military action. It would likely be no more credible than the manufactured evidence of connections between Iraq and Al Qaeda used to justify the Iraq war.

Goss reportedly held out a carrot to the Turkish government in exchange for Turkish intelligence or the use of US airbases in Turkey to carry out the strikes: "The Turkish government has also been given the 'green light' to strike camps of the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Iran on the day in question," *Der Spiegel* wrote, citing the DDP article.

The Bush administration has long insisted that it retains the "military option" to target Iranian nuclear facilities, which the US government claims will be used to build nuclear weapons.

The credibility of the reports from the DDP is bolstered by the fact that over the past several weeks Turkey has hosted several top-level American and other Western officials, including Goss, FBI Director Robert Mueller, NATO Secretary-General Jaap De Hoop Scheffer and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who is slated to visit Turkey again later this month.

Goss's trip, in particular, has received a great deal of attention in the Turkish press, which has speculated that his unusually long meeting with both the head of Turkish intelligence and the prime minister may have involved discussions about possible US strikes.

The reports have been downplayed in Germany, denied by Turkey and entirely ignored by the American media and political establishment. They were not raised publicly at all during US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's recent trip to Germany, though no doubt there were discussions behind the scenes.

The silence of the American media is particularly noteworthy. No major newspaper has covered the reports, which are now two weeks old, though the news agency Reuters had a report on January 2 on the denials from Turkey.

The American media is well schooled in covering up or suppressing news stories that might threaten the interests of American imperialism. To cite one example: For over a year the *New York Times* withheld publication of its article exposing illegal spying by the National Security Agency.

If the American media had wind of planned air strikes against Iran, it is quite likely that the story would be suppressed on the grounds of "national security."

The indication of plans for a US air strike comes on the heels of a number of reports about possible Israeli-launched attacks on Iranian nuclear sites. In December, the British newspaper *Sunday Times* cited sources within

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the Israeli military in reporting that the highest stage of readiness for a strike had already been initiated. The newspaper wrote that specific plans had been drawn up for using specially equipped F-15I fighters to bomb sites that Israel claims may contain nuclear facilities.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has warned that Israel will take all necessary steps to prevent a "nuclear Iran." Members of Sharon's former party, Likud, at a conference last weekend headed by Agricultural Minister Yisrael Katz, voted to "bomb Iran's nuclear reactor before it is too late," according to one of the participants.

In January 2005, *New Yorker* journalist Seymour Hersh cited former high-level intelligence officials in reporting that the Bush administration has carried out reconnaissance missions in Iran since the summer of 2004. "Much of the focus is on the accumulation of intelligence and targeting information on Iranian nuclear, chemical, and missile sites, both declared and suspected," Hersh wrote. "The goal is to identify and isolate three dozen, and perhaps more, such targets that could be destroyed by precision strikes and short-term commando raids."

The White House never denied Hersh's article. "In Washington, word circulated that the article was filled with 'inaccurate statements,'" *Der Spiegel* noted. "But no one rejected the core reporting behind the article."

The background of the recent reports about planned US strikes is the continued attempt by the American government to use Iran's nuclear program—which Iran insists is intended entirely for peaceful purposes—as a pretext for stepping up provocations against the country.

Talks between Iran and a group of European countries on Iran's nuclear program are set to resume this month. Iran has the explicit right under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to pursue peaceful nuclear programs; however the US, together with the European powers, has insisted that Iran give up all attempts to develop an independent nuclear fuel enrichment capability.

On January 3, Iran reported that it would resume certain aspects of its nuclear research program after a two-and-a-half-year freeze. It had agreed to the freeze, as a temporary measure, in conjunction with its negotiations with the Europeans.

Iran said that the research would not involve nuclear fuel production. The US, however, responded with new threats.

US State Department spokesman Sean McCormack declared, "Our view is that if Iran takes any further enrichment-related steps, the international community will have to consider additional measures to constrain Iran's nuclear ambitions."

The US has sought to have Iran's nuclear program referred to the United Nations Security Council. A resolution in the UN Security Council could be used as a pretext for future US military action; just as previous UN resolutions were used to justify the US invasion and occupation of Iraq.

On January 4, the Bush administration announced that it was ordering US banks to freeze the assets of two Iranian companies that it alleges are aiding an Iranian nuclear weapons program. This action followed new sanctions imposed December 27 against state-owned Chinese companies on the grounds that the firms were providing weapons support to Iran.

Also on January 4, the British newspaper *Guardian* published an article about a "western intelligence estimate" that concluded Iran was trying to build a nuclear bomb. The article did not name the specific agency or organization that had produced the intelligence estimate, but reported it had been drawn from intelligence agencies in Britain, France, Germany and Belgium.

The article, which provided no concrete facts or evidence to substantiate the claims of Iranian nuclear weapons plans, bore all the signs of a deliberate government leak designed to escalate pressure on Iran.

The threats against Iran reflect both long-term geo-strategic interests—including American imperialist ambitions to gain control of Iran's vast supplies of oil and natural gas—and more immediate considerations. Among the latter is a growing concern within the American political establishment over Iranian influence in Iraq.

During the run-up to the Iraqi elections held last month, the US sought to weaken political groups closely allied with Iran, especially the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). There are no doubt factions within the US military and the Bush administration that are inclined to address American difficulties in Iraq by expanding operations into Iran.

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